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SUBJECT: "COLOMBIA IS ON THE RIGHT PATH," FORMER PRESIDENT CLINTON

1. (U) During a half-day visit to Colombia June 22, President Clinton expressed unequivocal support for President Uribe and his policies, as well as for the Colombian people. Speaking to a business and leadership forum (Expogestion) with an audience of over 2,000 people - including President Uribe, former President Gaviria, and leading political figures and business executives - Clinton said he often points to Colombia as a country trying to improve itself through "perseverance, hard-work, and determination." He indicated great satisfaction with President Uribe's handling of Plan Colombia, which he had helped to start with former President Andres Patrana. Uribe asked Clinton to intercede on behalf of Colombia to continue with a second phase of the Plan.

2. (U) Following the thunderous applause for President Uribe, Clinton remarked to the crowd that it was not often that he received less applause than a sitting president, and that this was a testament to Uribe's leadership and the direction he had taken the country. He said he hoped Uribe, pending the Constitutional Court's decision, would serve for four more years.

3. (U) All major newspapers gave the visit front-page coverage on June 23. Leading daily El Tiempo showed Clinton walking in the streets side-by-side with President Uribe, under the headline "Clinton and Uribe on foot in Bogota." Presidential chief of staff Juan Lozano told the Ambassador the following day that such a walk would have been impossible five years ago given the security situation. A follow-up article on June 24 focused on Clinton's informal agenda, including his greeting people on the street and shopping for gifts. The same day, an op-ed section cartoon showed Clinton in a car with a sign "strong backing," and President Uribe on the street thanking him for his visit and support. The major television newscasts also gave ample coverage, focusing on Clinton's remarks as well as the walk with Uribe. Overall press treatment characterized the visit as a sign of strong support for President Uribe's democratic security policies, and recognition of Colombia's commitment to fight narco-trafficking and terrorism.

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